

DATELINE: WASHINGTON, D.C. NO. 129
ALINA ZERANSKI

NOVEMBER 17, 1976

WATCHDOG FOR THE ELDERLY: THE NATIONAL COUNCIL OF
SENIOR CITIZENS
(INSERTS AVAILABLE IN TAPE LIBRARY)

ANNCR: DATELINE: WASHINGTON, D.C. -- PICTURES IN SOUND OF PEOPLE, PLACES AND EVENTS HERE IN THE CAPITAL OF THE UNITED STATES -- BROUGHT TO YOU BY THE VOICE OF AMERICA EACH WEEK AT THIS TIME. TODAY, A REPORT PREPARED BY ALINA ZERANSKI ON A VISIT WITH OFFICIALS OF A POWERFUL ORGANIZATION THAT KEEP A WATCHFUL EYE ON CONGRESS AND ITS TREATMENT OF OLDER AMERICANS.

NARR: IN THE STATE OF ILLINOIS, ABOUT 3-HUNDRED CLUBS OF ELDERLY PERSONS RECENTLY LEARNED THAT ONE OF THEIR SENATORS VOTED AGAINST AN ISSUE OF VITAL IMPORTANCE FOR RETIRED PERSONS. THE MEMBERS OF THESE CLUBS -- ALL SENIOR CITIZENS -- DECIDED TO SEND LETTERS OF PROTEST TO THE SENATOR. IN ADDITION, THE LEGISLATIVE COMMITTEE OF THE NATIONAL COUNCIL OF SENIOR CITIZENS, WITH THE HEADQUARTERS HERE IN WASHINGTON, D.C., WAS ASKED TO CONTACT THE SENATOR IN QUESTION AND EXPLAIN THE POINT OF VIEW OF THE MEMBERS.

TAPE: CUT ONE -- HUTTON

"THE PURPOSE OF THE NATIONAL COUNCIL OF SENIOR CITIZENS IS REALLY TO ACHIEVE A STRONGER VOICE FOR OLDER PEOPLE OF AMERICA AND TO ENABLE THEM TO CONTINUE EVEN AFTER THEY RETIRE TO TRY AND BUILD A BETTER LIFE FOR THE OLDER PEOPLE OF AMERICA AND FOR THE MIDDLE AGED AND FOR THE YOUNG."

NARR: THAT WAS WILLIAM HUTTON, EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR OF THE NATIONAL COUNCIL OF SENIOR CITIZENS. THE COUNCIL IS AN ORGANIZATION OF SOME 3,500 CLUBS ACROSS THE COUNTRY WITH A COMBINED MEMBERSHIP OF MORE THAN THREE AND A HALF MILLION SENIOR

NARR: CITIZENS. THERE ARE ALTOGETHER 39 MILLION AMERICANS OVER AGE
(CONT'D) 55 AND NO ELECTED LEGISLATOR OR OFFICIAL CAN AFFORD TO
IGNORE SUCH A LARGE SEGMENT OF SOCIETY. AGAIN, EXECUTIVE
DIRECTOR HUTTON:

TAPE: CUT TWO -- HUTTON

"WE EARLY DISCOVERED THAT IN AMERICA, THERE WAS AN EXCESS OF ORIENTATION TOWARDS YOUTH, THAT IN FACT, THIS VERY MODERN COUNTRY WITH ALL ITS TECHNICAL ADVANCES WAS DEALING VERY HEAVILY WITH YOUTH AND LEAVING THE OLDER PEOPLE TO THEMSELVES, AND THEY WERE BECOMING FAST DISADVANTAGED. AND WE ALSO TOOK FROM AMERICA'S HISTORY A FUNDAMENTAL OF THE PIONEERING DAYS WHICH IS THAT IT IS THE SQUEAKY WHEEL THAT GETS THE GREASE. AND SO WE DECIDED THAT IF THE OLDER PEOPLE OF AMERICA COULD BE ORGANIZED TO SQUEAK TOGETHER AND SQUEAK MORE OFTEN, THEY WILL BE ABLE TO MAKE UP FOR THE DISORIENTATION THAT EXISTED. AND SO IN 1961, WE HAVE SET UP THE NATIONAL COUNCIL OF SENIOR CITIZENS TO ACTUALLY WORK FOR, TO BRING ATTENTION TO, AND FOCUS ATTENTION ON THE PROBLEMS OF OLDER PEOPLE SO THAT CONGRESS AND BUSINESS AND OTHERS WOULD PAY ATTENTION TO THESE PROBLEMS AND EVENTUALLY SOLVE THEM."

NARR: SENIOR CITIZENS CLUBS HOLD MEETINGS IN CHURCH HALLS, SCHOOL ROOMS OR COMMUNITY CENTERS. ABOUT ONE THIRD OF THE CLUBS CONSISTS OF GROUPS OF RETIREES WHO WERE ONCE ACTIVE IN THE TRADE UNION MOVEMENT, ANOTHER THIRD ARE CHURCH OR SYNAGOGUE GROUPS, WITH THE REMAINDER MAINLY GROUPS ORGANIZED FOR RECREATIONAL PURPOSES.

THE GOAL OF THE CLUBS IS TO CHANNEL THE INTEREST OF THE MEMBERS TOWARDS IMPORTANT ISSUES AND USEFUL ACTIVITY, TO INVOLVE THEM IN THE COMMUNITY, AND TO BECOME INFLUENTIAL IN THE DRAFTING OF CITY AND COUNTY ORDINANCES AS WELL AS FEDERAL AND STATE LEGISLATION. ALL INDIVIDUAL CLUBS ARE SUPPLIED WITH INFORMATION CONCERNING BASIC PENDING NEW LEGISLATION. THE HEADQUARTERS OF THE ORGANIZATION SERVES AS A CLEARING HOUSE SO THAT AN IDEA FROM MICHIGAN CAN ALSO BE USED EFFECTIVELY IN NEVADA OR CALIFORNIA.

TAPE: CUT THREE -- HUTTON

"WE BELIEVE THAT THE BEST, MOST EFFECTIVE WAY OF REACHING THE CONGRESS OF THE UNITED STATES IS THROUGH THEIR CONSTITUENCY. WE DON'T ORGANIZE OR MAINTAIN A LOBBY. ALL THAT IS NECESSARY FOR US TO DO IS TO WATCH THE CONGRESS, WATCH THE LEGISLATION, AND TO PASS INTO CONGRESSMEN AND TO WORK IN SUGGESTED LEGISLATION."

NARR: THE NATIONAL COUNCIL OF SENIOR CITIZENS IS NON PARTISAN. IT WILL NOT ENDORSE ANY CANDIDATE OF ANY PARTY, BUT WILL PUBLISH HIS PLATFORM AND VOTING RECORDS. FORTY PERSONS ARE EMPLOYED AT THE HEADQUARTERS AND A SEPARATE STAFF OF TWENTY-NINE IS ALSO WORKING HERE IN GOVERNMENT PROGRAMS RUN BY THE COUNCIL. THEY MAKE IT POSSIBLE TO EMPLOY POOR OLDER PEOPLE FOUR HOURS A DAY ON SPECIAL COMMUNITY SERVICES. FIFTY PERCENT OF THE COUNCIL'S BUDGET COMES FROM MEMBERSHIP DUES. THE FEDERAL GOVERNMENT PROVIDES TWENTY-FIVE PERCENT, ANOTHER FIFTEEN PERCENT OF THE MONEY COMES FROM DONATIONS AND THE REMAINDER FROM THE SALE OF PUBLICATIONS.

TAPE: CUT FOUR -- HUTTON

"AT THE LEGISLATIVE CONFERENCE WE SET UP COMMITTEES WHICH DISCUSS MOST OF THE MAJOR ISSUES OF INTEREST TO THE ELDERLY. FOR EXAMPLE, ADEQUATE INCOME IS OBVIOUSLY THE FIRST ISSUE. THE SECOND ISSUE IS COMPREHENSIVE HEALTH CARE, YOU KNOW, THAT OLDER PEOPLE CAN AFFORD. AND THEN THERE IS HOUSING, HOUSING FOR SENIOR CITIZENS AT RENT THEY CAN AFFORD, THAT IS A VERY MAJOR ISSUE. AND PERHAPS THEN FOURTHLY, PERHAPS TRANSPORTATION FOR THE ELDERLY."

NARR: THE NATIONAL COUNCIL OF SENIOR CITIZENS USED ITS INFLUENCE WITH CONGRESS, TO OBTAIN EIGHT INCREASES IN SOCIAL SECURITY BENEFITS PEGGED TO THE RISING COST OF LIVING. IT ALSO HAS BEEN INSTRUMENTAL IN PASSING A PROGRAM OF THREE POINT THREE BILLION DOLLARS TO BE SPENT OVER THE NEXT THREE YEARS IN BUILDING LOW RENT, COMFORTABLE HOUSING FOR THE ELDERLY.

NARR: AND THE COUNCIL DOES NOT SPARE EFFORTS TO PROVE THAT
(CONT'D) SENIOR CITIZENS HAVE PLENTY TO OFFER -- THEIR YEARS OF
EXPERIENCE, THEIR WISDOM IN JUDGEMENT, THEIR VALUABLE TIME--
AND THAT THEY HAVE A VOICE THAT COUNTS.

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SOUND OF PEOPLE, PLACES AND EVENTS HERE IN AND AROUND THE
AMERICAN CAPITAL BROUGHT TO YOU BY THE VOICE OF AMERICA EACH
WEEK AT THIS TIME.

TODAY, YOU HEARD ABOUT THE NATIONAL COUNCIL OF SENIOR
CITIZENS. NEXT-----ANOTHER DATELINE.

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